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Clinton's Contorted Comparisons:

Planes, Guns, & Automobiles

Our clever President takes a back seat to no one when it comes to reaching out and touching the people. One of his lesser known methods is explaining complex policy issues with folksy analogies that, to paraphrase Mencken, are simple, resonant, and wrong. In fact, when properly understood, the following analogies actually argue *against* his policies.

Spin

What do you think the country would think of me if I said, you know, I'm really worried about how many people are crowding in our airports and how hot they are and tired they are and pushed together they are . . . it just drives them nuts. And I just think it's so burdensome, and since almost all of them are law-abiding, let's just take [the metal detectors] all out. And the next time a plane blows up, we'll throw the book at them. [T]hat is the logic behind not doing these background checks [at gun shows].

*[President Clinton,
4/8/00]*

Fact

Public outcry would be deafening if President Clinton treated flyers the way he wants to treat gun owners.

Federal law requires background checks for all sales by firearms dealers (gun shows included) but not for sales between private citizens. Likewise, Americans must walk through a metal detector to fly commercially, but not for a non-commercial flight.

Yet President Clinton would require background checks for gun show sales by those who do not sell guns as a business. This would be like forcing people through metal detectors to fly with a pilot who only occasionally charts his plane.

Moreover, the metal detectors would have to operate like background checks. The General Accounting Office reports 23 percent of FBI checks take up to 2 hours, and 5 percent take from 2 hours to 3 days. What's worse, in one year, the FBI issued roughly 2,000 unjust denials, and let nearly 3,400 disqualified applicants buy guns.

If we treated flyers like President Clinton wants to treat gun owners: (1) every fourth passenger — commercial and non-commercial — would be delayed for up to three days, while each year (2) thousands of law-abiding travelers would be forbidden to fly, and (3) thousands of terrorists would be allowed aboard airplanes.

Spin

Every state in this country already requires . . . automobile drivers to have a license. I think they ought to do the same thing for handgun purchases. Now, specifically, I propose a plan to ensure that all new handgun buyers must first have a photo license from their state showing they passed a Brady background check and a gun safety course before they get the gun.

[State of the Union Address, 1/27/00]

Fact

Treating guns like cars would mean *less* gun regulation, not more.

The President would love to create the impression that the government regulates cars more heavily than guns — all the better to convince voters there is a regulatory vacuum he should be allowed to fill.

In fact, guns are the most heavily regulated consumer product in the nation, requiring FBI clearance for every single retail purchase.

The President's analogy also falters because states do not license car *buyers*, they license *drivers*. Anyone who wants to buy a car may do so, license or no license. Nor is a license required to sell a car, nor to drive one on private property. States issue licenses to take an automobile out in public, on public roads.

If states were to treat guns like cars, they would have to return significantly more freedom to gun owners by issuing them licenses to carry a concealed weapon as readily as they issue car owners licenses to drive.

Thirty states already issue such "concealed-carry permits" (Vermont does not require a permit), and research by Yale University Professor John R. Lott has shown them to be associated with dramatic decreases in violent crime.

Perhaps the President will take a second look at his homespun sophistry, and come out in favor of concealed-carry permits and truly instant background checks. It wouldn't be like the President to do so, but it would have the appeal of being honest.

RPC staff contact: Michael F. Cannon, 4-2946